

No Matter How Wet the Weather Outside— Home Fires and Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Are More of a Threat Than Ever!

The risk of fire increases as families spend more time indoors. Careless smoking, unattended cooking, children playing with matches or lighters, and misuse of heating and electrical equipment are just a few of the causes of fatal fires in West Virginia.

Along with good fire safety practices every day, smoke alarms are a must! Smoke alarms sense particles of incomplete combustion due to fire and give you the early warning your family needs to escape a potential deadly fire.

Smoke alarms are proven to double your chances of escaping a fire—but you must take care of your smoke alarms so they can protect you!

- Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home, especially in and near sleeping areas.
- Install alarms as shown in manufacturers' directions.
- Test alarms weekly and keep the outsides free of dust.
- Replace batteries at least once a year. Pick an easy-to-remember date such as a birthday, Daylight Savings Time (coming up in March), or an anniversary.
- **Never remove a battery from a smoke alarm unless you're putting in a new one!** If your alarm sounds due to smoke from cooking or some other false alarm, wave a towel under the alarm or open a window until the air clears and the alarm quiets. Many models have a silence feature for "nuisance alarms".
- If your detector is more than 10 years old, replace it! Consider buying a smoke detector with a 10-year "long-life" lithium battery.

Have a Family Escape Plan! Sit down with your family and make a diagram of your home, showing 2 ways out of each room if possible. Also decide on a safe meeting place away from the house where family members can meet once outside. Everyone should know how—and when—to call 911 or other emergency numbers. Make sure everyone understands the importance of getting out and staying out if there's a fire. **NEVER** call 911 from inside a house where there's fire! Escape must always be your first response.

Remember those with special needs! Some family members might need extra help due to mobility, vision, hearing or cognitive disabilities. Be sure to include them in emergency planning. Contact your local fire department, Independent Living Center or State Fire Marshal's Office for more information.

Carbon Monoxide—The Silent Killer! Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that is produced when fuels such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil and methane burn incompletely. In the home, fuel-burning appliances such as gas heaters, stoves, kerosene heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces, gas water heaters, generators, etc. are potential sources of carbon monoxide. CO is

called the silent killer because it can affect families without their knowledge. Flu-type symptoms can occur over time due to faulty appliances or heaters, or misuse of heating and cooking equipment. If this situation is not detected, CO can poison the body, displacing oxygen until headache, nausea, dizziness, unconsciousness or even death occurs.

According to the National Safety Council, 200-300 unintentional injury deaths a year are caused by carbon monoxide poisoning. Some tips to remember:

- Install CO detectors in a central location outside each separate sleeping area. For bedrooms that are spaced apart, make sure there's a CO alarm for each area.
- Test CO alarms at least once a month and replace according to manufacturers' directions. Replace batteries at least once a year—take care of your smoke detectors and CO detectors at the same time!
- Never use your oven to heat your home, and never use a charcoal or gas grill indoors, or in other enclosed areas such as garages.
- Fuel-powered generators and vehicles left running in an attached garage can also produce deadly amounts of carbon monoxide.
- **CO alarms are NOT substitutes for SMOKE ALARMS!** Know the difference between the sounds of smoke alarms and CO alarms—take both sounds seriously!
- If your CO detector sounds, leave the house immediately, just as you would for a fire. Once outside at a safe location, contact your local fire department. Do not re-enter your house until they give you the go-ahead.

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